Episode Three
Fred Wellman – Scout Comms

Public Service Announcement:

Man: I served in Vietnam
Woman: I served in Iraq
Narrator: No matter where you served or when
Man: VA has benefits for Veterans of every generation
Narrator: To learn what benefits you may be eligible for visit www.va.gov

Intro Monologue:

Good morning, everyone! I'm Timothy Lawson, your host for This Week at VA. November is an exciting month as we prepare to celebrate Veterans Day, the Marine Corps Birthday, and Native American Heritage month. We'll be sure to recognize each of those here on the podcast in the following weeks. This week's episode brings us a feature interview with Army Veteran Fred Wellman, resources for veteran entrepreneurs, and our Veteran of the Day, John Kamin.

But first, I want to tell you about an important resource at your health care center: your patient advocate. The Patient Advocacy Program is for all veterans and their families who receive care at Veterans Health Administration facilities and clinics. We want to be sure you have someone to go to with your concerns in a timely manner and to help you receive care. When we receive concerns via social media, the first thing we ask the customer is "have you spoken with your patient advocate." If you don't know who your patient advocate is, simply ask for them at your facility and introduce yourself. Make that connection early and trust in them to help address your concerns.

Interview Intro:

Our feature interview for episode three is with Army Veteran Fred Wellman. Fred is currently the Founder and CEO of Scout Comms and works primarily in the Veteran space. He is going to share with us the challenges and struggles he had after retiring from the Army and starting his own business. He also provides great insight for Veterans reentering the job market. Enjoy.

Interview with Fred Wellman:

Timothy L.: All right, VA family. I'm here with Army veteran Fred Wellman. Sir, thank you so much for joining me.
Fred W.: My pleasure, Tim. Great to be here. Thank you so much for the opportunity.
Timothy L.: Yeah, of course. You and I have rubbed shoulders a couple of times in the past. Once at the SVA Conference. I think we've run into

each other at VA headquarters. And I think we were even at a mutual friend's going away or something like that.

Fred W.: Yeah.

Timothy L.: And we have run into each other. But, still I haven't really gotten a chance to get to know you. So, I'm probably just as familiar with you as maybe the audience is. So, let's get to know you as a veteran first. Let's go all the way back to that decision to join the military because it's the one thing so many of us have in common. What drove you to make that decision?

Fred W.: Well, like a lot of us, I grew up in a military family. My father is a World War 2 vet, or was, a World War 2 veteran Marine. He served the end of World War 2. So, we kind of grew up with that in mind. We were raised with the military kind of mentality. Both of my uncles, my mom's brother, and my dad's brother passed away in service. One in Korea with the Marines and one in the Air Force in a bomber crash. So, it's just sort of been the family legacy. And I was the last of four kids. So, I grew up with an eye on my whole life of military service, possibly as one of my best options. I always wanted to fly. And so, as I got older and I got closer going to college, I stumbled on to the military academies. And after looking at all the military academies, I applied to West Point, got in, in 1983, and graduated in 1987 as a Second Lieutenant. I was commissioned, of all things, an aviator. So, I ended up flying Scout helicopters in the Army.

Timothy L.: When you graduated, I was two years old.

Fred W.: Thanks for making me feel older. I appreciate that. My wife last night was mentioning how gray my beard has gotten. So, thank you. Thanks for pointing that out, honey.

[LAUGHTER]

Timothy L.: Well, you know, I like to make my guests feel comfortable.

Fred W.: Yeah, well, you know, it's good to be old. Still here, right? I'm still above ground.

Timothy L.: Right, exactly. When you look back at your military career, I mean, you retired from the military. So, you did your full set of service. You had four combat deployments. Is that right?

Fred W.: Yeah. I actually have a weird career. It wasn't just a straight 22. I did deploy. My first tour in the Army after Flight School was in Korea. I came back with the 24th Infantry Division at Fort Stewart. I was based at Hunter Army Airfield. So, I took a Scout platoon of helicopters to Desert Storm and Desert Shield with the Apaches there. I fought the last battle of the war, as a matter of fact. And then served a total of 13 years that first time. And when we were living in Atlanta and I was working at Third Army headquarters, I actually resigned my commission and joined the Reserves in early 2000. So, I spent a year and a half as a reservist working at Forces Command Headquarters was my drill site, and got involved in local

politics down in Georgia. The whole nine yards. And when 9-11 hit, I was actually running for mayor of a small town called Peachtree City, Georgia. And I got mobilized that very day on 9-11, or called. Came to work two days after 9-11 to work a shift in the Crisis Action Center at Forces Command Headquarters, and got mobilized, got put on two-year orders right then. And my wife and I sat down not long after, and I said, "We're going to war. I'm a soldier." She said, "Yep, I know you are." And she says, "I know you want to go back in." So, I actually called up the Army and volunteered to come back regular Army. So, I joined the 101st Airborne almost, just about a year after 9-11. August of 2002, I returned to the 101st Airborne as a Blackhawk pilot and Operations Officer. So, I ended up doing Iraq 1 with the 101st. And then I went back as a Public Affairs Officer two more times.

Timothy L.: This is a question that I really enjoy asking veterans that experienced the military both before and after 9-11, because I think there's so much interesting experience there. Could you just discuss briefly the change in climate in the military from before 9-11 and after 9-11, and what you saw?

Fred W.: Yeah, it's funny. That's actually one of the reasons I left the Army, to be candid with you, at the 13-year mark. I had that cathartic experience as a young officer to lead men in combat, and tough combat. Desert Storm doesn't really get credit for what a tough fight it was, certainly from my end. I lost two of my men in a helicopter crash during the air war. So, the peacetime, 1999-2000 time frame, it had just become a little bit underwhelming, I hate to say. You know, we were worried about things like making PowerPoint briefings on time. And it just wasn't firing me up anymore. And then of course, post-9-11, we had a mission. Everything had a mission. It was such a different environment, the second ten years of my service, which was we had one eye all the time on the fact that we were going to deploy. I mean, I did, what, three tours virtually a year on, year off were my tours. And I think that really changed the military, but it really diversified the military. I mean, one of the things that I noticed the most about, by the time I retired six years ago, seven years ago, was how diverse we were. We really brought in this new generation of service-minded young soldiers and service members. I'm not actually sure if it was the same. It was really remarkable to see the diversity of thought and the diversity of backgrounds that rushed to the sound of the guns and joined us to serve their nation after 9-11. So, it's inspiring to me. I'm just a huge fan of the Millennial generation. I'm a huge fan of the young soldiers I had the privilege to lead after 9-11. I continue to be in awe of them today in working in the veterans' sector.

Timothy L.: You know, Fred, I'm so glad you mentioned that because it's something that I haven't been vocal enough about, in that I think that my generation's best contribution to society today is that decade of service from 2001 to 2011. And how many different people joined the military, how many different people got that experience, and then came out of the military and used that experience plus their own unique personalities and characters and used that to benefit society. And I think that, you know, I don't want to say that the war did us good, but I think that that allowed so many different people to get that unique experience, to get the leadership and everything that comes with serving in the military, and come back and even be a bigger impact to society than they may of already have been if they hadn't done that. And I think that, you know, you and I both served with people of different races, genders, religions. After 9-11, you had one mission, and that's what you focused on.

Fred W.: And I think even, and in this tumultuous political time, what was remarkable to me was that the diversity of political thought. I mean, let's be honest. Us old-timers are all considered pretty conservative and blah, blah, blah. What I loved seeing is, is youn men and women who would not have typically joined, I think, in the old days, but they want to serve. They saw people like me. I mean, look at my military service. I was a pilot, but what I'm known for is stuff that had nothing to do with boots on the ground in a certain sense. I spent most of that first tour, once we reached Q-West Airbase, which is where I was stationed, which, of course, has been in the news lately. When we reached Q-West, I stumbled into running Civil Affairs. I spent a good chunk of my first tour of combat, after the fight, after we took down the regime, building schools. I mean, my organization, the brigade, my battalion and I, we ended up building like twenty schools, two clinics, you know. I've eaten a lot of sheep. I mean, it's a remarkable—Iraq was such a remarkable, especially Iraq—was such a remarkable combat experience, in the sense of, you know, everybody who served there had a very different experience. My experience involved actually sitting with local Iraqis and learning about their culture and building things, re-building their country. And I think we saw a lot of young men and women who saw that and said, "You know, this is an opportunity for me to do more than, not just staying at home and serve. I can do something bigger." And I think that's a remarkable thing. And I do say that, you know, war is a unique thing. It's such a cathartic experience for everyone who experiences it. And again, it all comes out to . . . one of my jokes that people hear all the time is—and I stole it from the autism world, by the way—is when you've met one veteran, you've met one veteran. Because when people try to block us all together as a

single entity, with 20.9 million of us, and, of course, some 3.5 million of us have served in combat after 9-11, we've all got such unique experiences. But that's the one thing you do see that binds us, the spirit of service and the spirit of giving. And I tell you, I have just nothing but admiration for those who rushed to the sound of the guns and continue to serve today.

Timothy L.: You had sort of a mini-transition out before 9-11. And then of course, you retired after 9-11. I'm curious to know what the differences in challenges that those two had comparatively. One thing that we've definitely noticed, in reflecting on the past 10-15 years, is that veterans have had a very strong difficulty transitioning out of the military because that mission is so strong and inherent during the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. That transition is harder because the mission is just not inherently there. And I'm wondering if when you sort of did your mini-transition during peacetime, if that was almost easier to manage because it looked a little bit more like real life. What are your thoughts there?

Fred W.: That's a great question, and one I've never been hit before. I love that. That's such a great question because I do have the unique experience of having quit twice, and, you know, it took once. I tried to quit the Army all the time; it just never took. You could almost argue it hasn't still to this day. It's funny. That's the unique thing about the two differences. So, I got out the first time in essentially 1999, early 2000, and I got out the second time, I retired in late 2009, 2010. So, by the time I retired, retired, there was just such a wide breadth of opportunities and recognition of what veterans brought to the table. Just to be candid, the second time was much easier. The first time, I know it was really hard to explain to potential employers what we brought to the table as veterans in 1999. They just didn't know us. I mean, believe it or not, as much as we talk about the civil-military divide, I think in 1999, people really had no idea what we do, right? I mean, at least today, there's some understanding after all these years of war. I remember distinctly the idea that I would make as much money as I made as a young major in the civilian world was stupid. I had a guy tell me that, if he was going to pick a guy who had 13 years of experience, you know, mine, I might as well just be right out of college with my 13 years, because I haven't been really doing any real work. [LAUGHS] Which was news to me. I was like, "Wow, that's news to me. I thought I was really busy that whole time." But, and for me, what I ended up doing was I ended up being a—I was an Aviation Officer. And most of my time was spent doing staff jobs, like every young officer, young field-grade officer. So, I ended up getting a jo as a project manager. And what I did, I had to go out and find, I actually went out and took a civilian community college course on project management, the civilian model of project management. I

had to redo my whole resume to look like a civilian project management resume. And then I was lucky. I stumbled on to a company that had an executive VP who was an old Navy fighter pilot. And so, he kind of got it. But I would honestly say the tools I had available to me—I mean, I didn't take a single transition class. I didn't file for VA or anything. I got out at 13 with nothing. I had nothing from the military when I got out. Flash forward 2010. I retire. I had, even then was TAPS. TAPS was not great, but it wasn't bad. I took the classes. I learned a lot. People at least when I approached them for work, they knew—I was actually sought out by someone. The job I got, I was actually pursued for it. I didn't necessarily seek it out per se. So, the two transitions were remarkably different. I do think we're doing it better today. And there's certainly a ton more resources available today as a veteran than there ever were in the old days. And that's a significant difference, I think. I think it's easy, having experienced both—I think it's such a great question is. Having seen both, and people look at me like I'm crazy when I tell them that. I say, "Look, you have no idea how much easier it is." And they look at me like I'm nuts because we all heard the horror stories, how hard it is to transition. I'm like, "Dude, back in '99, I had to explain what an officer was." I mean, I remember explaining to a hiring person the difference between what an officer did every day. And I mean, literally—oh, my favorite one in '99 was a Vietnam vet actually, but it was like a draftee from Vietnam, telling me that I had to understand that, as a project manager/consultant like I was going to be, that I wasn't going to have some clerk following me around to do all my typing for me. [LAUGHS] Right? And I'm like, "Dude." I was in combat. Three-star general is like a PowerPoint guy. I'm like, "I think you're confused. In today's Army, it's the majors who do all the typing." And it was just remarkable these beliefs that somehow I had like some Corporal Klinger following me around everywhere to do all my work for me. But, again, I think we do face a situation now where people are better aware of what the military brings to the table and what a veteran's experience is. While we have a ways to go, but I do believe, when you look at the unemployment rate right now, I mean, we're at 4%. That tells you that clearly our peers are finding a place for themselves in the civilian world.

Timothy L.: My father retired from the Navy in 1999 and it was a challenge for my family, because, like you said, there just wasn't a whole lot of resources out there, even the transitional program back then was more how to make a resume and less here are all the resources you can use. And I think one of the biggest differences that I see now versus what my dad experienced—so comparing my dad's retirement and me getting out of the Marine Corps—is there were

more people ahead of me that got out, that as soon as they heard I got out, fed me information. And I don't think that's something that my dad experienced when he retired.

Fred W.: Yep. No, I think you're absolutely right. I mean, that's the thing. There's just so, such a cacophony of resources. Frankly, in many ways, that's a big chunk of my business at ScoutComms is sorting through this wave, sorting through this cacophony of opportunities for our veterans, picking out the good programs, and helping those good programs reach their target audience and actually make a difference. There are many good programs that, frankly, suffer because people have never heard of them. I mean, I can't tell you how often I stumble on to a new non-profit or a new corporate, some great American corporations offering programs, that are dying on the vine for nothing else than lack of awareness among their target audience. So, it really is, I mean, think of the dichotomy of that from . . . like I say, when I got out in '99, where . . . I mean, I was literally having to explain to headhunters and all what I brought to the table, and being told to expect at least a 25% to 30% pay cut from being a major in the Army because people just don't recognize our experience as being valuable. So, it's really, candidly, that's why, you know, I joke all the time. One of the reasons I went into the Army again was, after joining the Reserves, was I needed the extra money. I took a pay cut and that $600 a month as a major in the Reserves made a huge difference in our family budget.

Timothy L.: Yeah. What do you miss the most about the Army?

Fred W.: You know, it's funny. People ask me that all the time. And I'm very blessed because I still work within our circle. I'm fortunate to still be a veterans' advocate and still work with my peers in the military to this day. For me, a lot of times—people say, "Oh, the camaraderie and all"—that's true, but I was a field grade officer. There was also a lot of—it's a little bit *Lord of the Flies* sometimes in that line of work. To be candid, it's funny. I tell people all the time is getting up and putting the American flag on my shoulder. I mean, there was, I can't tell you the amount of pride that was within me when I pulled that uniform on and there was a flag on my right shoulder. There was, at the time, 101st Airborne Screaming Eagle, combat patch that I was very proud of. I had a Ranger Tab. There's something that makes your spine straighten. There's something that makes your chin go higher when you're given the good fortune to wear the American flag as a professional representative of the United States every day. And so, to me, that's what I think about a lot, is I look at my son. My son's in the Army now. He's at Fort Bragg. And my chin goes up when I see him in uniform. Because I know that this is someone who has dedicated their life to a service above themselves. So, yeah, I think, I often feel that way. I kind of, I love what I do, but there was just something

about that, you know, buttoning up that ACU, you know, zipping up that uniform, fitting into a flight suit—I miss that [LAUGHS]—I would never fit into one now. And, of course, when I was flying, the idea of strapping yourself on to a machine that's going to take you into incredible adventures. And the things that I saw. I mean, I tell people, you know, one of the things I loved about, especially combat and where I served, as dangerous and crazy as it is, every now and then. I mean, I still call myself a kid from Missouri. I grew up in a small town in Missouri. And I still sit back sometimes. I remember many times flying where I'd sit back in the cockpit and look, just look, and go, My God, I get to see this. I thank God every day that I put the uniform so I get to be a part of this moment in history. I remember, even as a Public Affairs Officer, being in meetings with General Dempsey. I remember a remarkable meeting where Don Rumsfeld, Mr. Rumsfeld, came to visit us in Baghdad. And it was all the Deputy Secretaries and Undersecretaries, it was all the Generals in Iraq, and me and one other Lieutenant Colonel, that was it. And he's taking notes, and I'm sitting there going, "Crap! This is like, I've got to write this down. This is huge." [LAUGHS] Huge stuff, you know? I was really fortunate to, you know, I worked for General David Petraeus when he was a Lieutenant General. I've known him for many years. He was my professor at West Point. You know, those moments where you work for somebody like that, and you're in the room, you know at the Hamilton, you know, be in the room where it happened. And I really do count my blessings that, for many, especially the latter part of my career, there were a lot of times that I was fortunate to be that guy in the room where it happened. And I'm able to take that and treasure those memories.

Timothy L.: So, entrepreneurship is one that has been consistent in the veteran's space. In fact, just over 49% of World War 2 vets went on to own or operate their own business, which is huge. And that has been something that I've seen be very common, even though it's less so now, it's still common in the Iraq and Afghanistan War veterans coming home, starting their own business. How did you get interested in entrepreneurship? And what were some of the resources you used to learn about that space?

Fred W.: I'm a horrible example. So, I am an entrepreneur because I got fired from my first job after the Army, right? It's a really real story. It's a very inspiring story. I joined a firm after I left the Army. I picked a smaller communications firm. I believed I would learn more in a smaller environment, and I did. Unfortunately, it wasn't a great fit for us professionally, which I think is a common refrain we hear quite a bit. One of my clients, actually about two and a half years ago, with Syracuse University and a company called VetAdvisor, we actually did a survey and found out that in our

survey—14 were veterans—that 45% of the veterans leave their first job within the first year after leaving the military. So, that's something we had heard anecdotally. And I was one of those. I'm one of the 45%. It wasn't a great fit for either my company or I. So, I struck out fully conscious that, as a fancy West Point and Harvard graduate, I would find a job within days because I'm so cool. And that was not happening. I found myself in the job market in October 2010, right at the height of the recession, especially here in Washington. My industry, the public relations industry, doesn't tend to hire at that time of year because it's sort of the end of the year and contracts are wrapping up. So, I was really in a bind. I had four kids. I had a brand new house I just bought. So, I interviewed with everybody. And what happened was I noticed as I interviewed these large PR firms that there wasn't any veterans. Very few of the large agencies that we all know and love have veterans on their team. There's a host of reasons for that. And so, the seed corn grew in my head of being that guy. And so, I had the good fortune—it's kind of a funny story—I interviewed with a company. The guy that interviewed me, the COO, was a veteran of Israeli Air Force, of all things. And so I interviewed—two pilots in an interview—it was mostly inappropriate stories and cussing. [LAUGHS] And as we walked out, he said, "Fred, what's your goals? What's your long term goals?" I said, "Well, I want to join a good firm like yours, grow up, maybe become a partner, take over, maybe start my own someday." He said, "Why don't you start your own company now?" He goes, "Nobody's hiring. Even we are barely hiring." I said, "You know, honestly, David," I said, "I don't really know where . . ." I was in the Army 22 years. I was in a small firm for a year that I really didn't get a lot of control over things. I said, "I don't even know what right looks like to start a company." And he laughed and he said, "Let me tell you something. None of us what the F we're doing. If you wait until you know what right looks like, you'll never start." [LAUGHTER] And I was, like, "That's fair advice." So, I drove back to Stafford County, Virginia, from D.C., and I told my wife, "Hey, we're going to start our own company." She said, "Great. What are you going to call it?" I said, "Oh, ScoutComms." I used to be a Scout, I do comms. ScoutComms." It was available on every social media channel. My journey to entrepreneurship was, I call myself very much an accidental entrepreneur. I would love to have said I've taken all the wonderful training that I work with now. I work with IVMF at Syracuse and the EDD program. I work with Hiring Our Heroes. I work with a number of programs that are just remarkable. Unfortunately, I had four kids and a mortgage. And so, I went to the Stafford County Library and I checked out—I'm not making this up, by the way—I checked out a book, *How to Start a Business for Dummies*. And

that's my education. I checked it out because I couldn't afford to buy it. That was my Bible. And then I surrounded myself with mentors, fellow entrepreneurs, fellow CEOs. Guys who had been doing it for a long time were willing to give me their advice, which is an amazing thing about being an entrepreneur, is that there's so many peers who are willing—even people who technically would be competitors—are often willing to sit down with me and say, "Here's how I'd do it," or, "Hey, let's figure out how we can work together. How can I coach you and mentor you and help you?" And then we built ScoutComms from there. And I got a couple of really big breaks early. And we were able to build it from my unfinished basement to where we are today, which is eight employees. Our sixth anniversary is next month actually.

Timothy L.: That's amazing. How old were you when you first founded ScoutComms?

Fred W.: Ah, that's a great question. 45 years old.

Timothy L.: Okay. That's such an important thing to point out because I think people feel like their ship has sailed. I think, Colonel Sanders was like in his fifties or even sixties maybe when he started KFC. It's important to remember that entrepreneurship, when you're inspired, it's never too late.

Fred W.: And that's the thing. And we can't discount, and I'm not going to act like I had this really, it was so easy, or hard. I mean, I had certain very good things come my way. One of those, of course, is my Army retirement, and you at the VA. The VA, really, the VA truly saved my bacon when I was dead broke. Because I finally filed my claim and, God bless the VA, my claim was processed really fast, like four months mine got turned. And that check truly, well, bought bacon. [LAUGHS] You know? And so, I always joke that the VA truly saved . . . in many ways, VA is one of the step-parents of ScoutComms as much as anyone because, for no other reason than being able to, you know, I was able to accept certain risks. I mean, that's the other thing about being older. The challenge is you have kids and mortgages and those kinds of things that come with being older. I was very fortunate to have a great Army retirement. I had healthcare. I had a check, at least enough to buy food, if you will. Not enough to pay the mortgage as it turned out, but I had food, and four kids are always hungry as it turns out. And, of course, as an older guy, I've kind of seen some stuff. And as a veteran of combat, especially as aviation, you know, flying night vision goggles in combat. Risk is a very relative term to me. I mean, I was actually dead broke. One of our dirty family secrets that some people know is that when I got mobilized on 9-11, I was taken out of my civilian job, put in the Reserves that day, and I was sent off to a conference. And unfortunately, I was in-processed incorrectly. And so I had four kids and a mortgage in Georgia, and I was entered with zero

dependents, zero, you know, single zero across the board. Right. Yeah. So, no BAH. So, I was getting base pay basically as a major. Unfortunately that was about a 50% pay cut from what I'd been making as a civilian. And then my wife was a flight attendant with Delta. And so as, many people may forget, every American stopped flying for a while after 9-11. So, my wife was laid off. So, our family income went from not bad to crap in about a day, thanks to 9-11. And that train ended putting us in . . . we actually ended up having . . . I was in combat—and it's an embarrassing story but it's true—I was in combat in 2003, when my wife had to go to the court and declare bankruptcy because we were dead broke from being mobilized and being laid off at such a horrible time in our country's history. So, it's tough. When I retired the second time, when I retired, we had the retirement check. I had a little bit more education, thanks to the Army and some bright ideas of my bosses to send me to grad school. So, I can't fool anybody and say I didn't come into this with certain tools that are not available to my peers. But that's also why many older veterans may, and especially retirees, do go entrepreneurship. We do have sort of a safety net. I have some healthcare, I had a little bit of money trickling in, enough that I could pay some bills and kind of keep the family above water for a while until we figured it out. And then of course, just that stubborn persistence, which said, "I'm not going to fail. This will succeed." And here we are. And I got a couple really good breaks early on that made this come together.

Timothy L.: Yeah, I really appreciate you opening up about that because one thing I've realized in the veteran space, we know all of these challenges and issues inside the space, right? Suicide, depression unemployment, homelessness—all these problems that we know exist, but we never admit to each other that we have experienced those things. And when I started opening up my run in with suicide, of course, everybody around me is like, "Oh, yeah, me too." I've done that now with the financial struggle that I had getting out of the military. I've done that with my close encounter with homelessness. It's amazing how every time I just mention it, at least two or three people are like, "Oh, yeah, me too." And it becomes so much easier to deal with and it becomes so much more reassuring to know . . . Okay, if that person's also dealing with it—and they're not in a bad spot, or they've dealt with it and they overcame it—and I think I can too. So, I really appreciate you sharing that with us. Another question I love asking people, tell me about a skill, a trade, a discipline, a routine, a habit that you had in the military that you've noticed is having a high contribution to your success now.

Fred W.: Ah, that's a great question. For me especially, as a former commissioned officer, it's the ability to get dropped into a situation

and quickly evaluate. It's that mental planning process for me. One of the things they start banging on you in the earliest training as a commissioned officer is the military planning process, right? There's a certain…it's laborious at first. How to write an op or how to write a mission statement. And so they start banging on your head. And then I had the good fortune to go to Ranger School as a young captain. Even as an aviator, I got to go. And again, the same at Ranger School. You're hammered in how to write an op order, even when you're on the fly, when you're sitting in the rain, in a creek, getting hand grenaded or mortared, you still have this planning process. And so, for me, it's been very helpful is no matter what happens, I'm dropped into a situation. I'm going to go, "Okay, let's figure this out real quick. What are our assets? What are the threats? What's our mission statement? What's the (inaudible @ 28:18), right?" And you go through this process. And it really does train your brain differently. And because of that, because of that different way of thinking, which is constantly evaluating, constantly saying, "Okay, the situation's changed." I had the good fortune to serve as the Chief of Future Operations at Third Army Headquarters. What a weird thing is that, right? In the old days, it was, there was Current Ops and Future Ops, or and plans. But my boss said, "Hey, General Franks, Tommy Franks, back as a three-star today, there's this gap. I mean, plans are long-term ops today. I want this 24 to 48, you know, 64 hours to be thought through. You know, today's fight is one thing, but what happens tomorrow's fight? So, I was in charge of kind of thinking around the next corner. I go, "If I g this way, we have to go this way." And for me, as an entrepreneur, I think the reason ScoutComms has survived is we started off with a mission, we started off with a concept. And then as we've grown, we've been able to say, "All right, this isn't working or this is working. Pivot, pivot, pivot." And where I see many of my peers fail now in the entrepreneurship world is they're not willing to accept failure and move on. And a lot of times, you talk about sunk costs, right? Well, you see that a lot in business, where I say, "Look, well, I already dropped $60,000 in this storefront. And yeah, we're losing money hand over foot, but it's sunk costs. Let's keep going and we'll put more money in it." And it sort of becomes a . . . the thing about us, as a military officer, especially as a combat officer, right? "Yeah, well, we lost that fight. So, there's no going back. We're not going to win. There's no sense in going. Keep on going with the middle. It's going to keep failing." So, that fail fast mentality, which says because we learned, if you fail fast, if you fail, people die. And so we pivot. And I see it a lot in my most successful veteran fellow veteran entrepreneurs is the ability to say, "Well, this isn't working. Let's go this way." And to not look back. And actually, I think that's one of the reasons

ScoutComms has succeeded over the years is we've constantly said, "This works, this didn't. Wait a minute, that was a stretch." And we have failed. I've had clients, I've been fired, and I deserved it. And that's okay, you know? It's the nature of my business. Sometimes it doesn't work with certain people or certain partnerships. But from that I learned, here's what we're good at, here's what we're not. Pivot. And that's how you know me at all, frankly. We have been doing defense work. We have been doing pretty much anything that had to do with the military, but none of our hearts really were into defense. I mean, I'm just not passionate about the defense industry. It's wonderful. I mean, I love people who work there, but for us, there's a ton of other PR firms that want to work in that sector. There's just a glut of fellow veterans working at that sector. But more and more of my work became veterans focused. Our big break really came when an agency in New York called me and their client had decided to focus exclusively on veterans housing. That client ended up being the Home Depot Foundation, who at the time—yeah—and the Home Depot Foundation at that time decided to leave green housing as their focus and instead focus on veterans housing. And at the time, their reasoning was amazing, if you know the history of the company. Frank Blake, who had been the CEO at the time, his son, Frank Blake, jr., was in the 4th ID in Tikrit. And so, at the time, I think 1100 or 1200 Home Depot associates were actually deployed with the National Guard and the Reserves. They had lost like a dozen of their associates when they deployed to combat. So, there was this great passion in the company. So, that was sort of our big break in the veterans sector. And more and more of my work became veterans focused. And we made a very conscious decision three years ago to drop all of our other practices and not do defense and just focus exclusively on veterans and military families. And we found a very nice niche for ourselves that at the time, and I think today, no one else fills. So, it really did come back to that training as an officer to say, "This works, this doesn't. Go with what works." Yeah, you got three courses of action, but one's going to work. Pick the one that works and go with it. And if it works well, pile on. Reinforce success. It's one thing to hear a lot of strategy, right? Don't reinforce failure; reinforce success. Just dedication to a mission focus on what we do and what we do well, being able to recognize changes quickly and adjust to those changes quickly. I had no question about that. I am an entrepreneur. And I believe I—I'm even—I have to laugh. I'm hesitant to say I'm a successful entrepreneur. I'm not sure when I'll say that. But, to this point, I don't want to rest on my laurels, right? We've had some success, I'll say it that way. But I do believe that is the case because of the fact that I was a military officer and I had just years of challenges and training—incredible training—that has prepared

me for these moments that I face sometimes where it gets a little ugly. There's been days I've missed paychecks. That's one of the dirty secrets of being an entrepreneur. And if you're a former officer, one of the first things they taught me at West Point, one of the first things I remember, was officers eat last. So, none of my employees ever missed a paycheck. But I certainly have. And that sort of comes with the territory. You know, I see so many people going into entrepreneurship thinking they're going to be millionaires, and I was like, "Yeah, good luck with that." [LAUGHTER] Because actually it's a lot of grunt work, it's a lot of sleepless nights where you realize that, "Gosh, the darkness." I'm droning. I apologize, but you know, and we lost, we had three clients wrap in one week one time. And it was shocking and it was a lot of money, about half our revenue at the time, in one week, and for all different reasons. But I remember that weekend going, geez, I don't know how I'm going to make it. This happens, dust myself off, get back up, and go back into the fight just like a soldier. Right? There just isn't time.

Timothy L.: So, I don't want to take up too much more of your time, but I do have one more question that I know the audience will get some value out of. You mentioned earlier the stat that 45% of veterans will quit their first job out of the military within a year. And that's something that happened to me, that happened to so many of my friends. And from all the conversations that I've had with veterans, I have realized that veterans are—and I think people in general, but veterans especially when they're trying to get that successful transition—will focus on jobs solely that they know they're qualified for and not necessarily ones that they would enjoy. And I think that that adds a little bit to the difficulty of staying within that first job, really understanding why you're there. Where do you think that fits?

Fred W.: In the sense of where guys fit into the job market, what that means for them, how do they avoid being that part of the 45%?

Timothy L.: Yeah.

Fred W.: Like for me, and in our survey and then for me, the hardest thing to measure, I think, when you're looking for a job is the cultural fit. What is the culture of this company I'm joining? How do I fit into the culture of this company? And that's such a hard one to measure. And the questions you have to ask of a potential employer are harder when it comes to culture, but you kind of know. And there's a lot of self-awareness that goes into that. And part of that is my failure point—and I did fail—was recognizing that my sort of—how do I put it delicately?—mavericky, ask questions . . . you know, it's funny. I had this wonderful guidanc when I was at West Point, as a cadet at West Point. I didn't do great at West Point, okay? I mean, I joked. I graduated in the top two-

thirds of my class. And I remember my Tactical officer which is like every company, cadets, has this senior officer, the major or captain, who is your advisor. And I remember my TAC telling me, "You know, Fred, that you don't fit in here." [LAUGHS] "You get that too?" He's like, "No." I was like, because I was constantly saying, "Well, it's great we've done this 200 years but why are we still doing it?" [LAUGHTER] You know? It was "Because we've always done it that way. Shut up." And so I always was that guy. And so, in this case, I remember him saying—this is great advice. He said, "Look, Fred, the great thing about the Army is that it's big enough that you can never fit in and have a successful career." All right? He said, "Maybe not in the Marines, maybe not here. They're smaller. But in the Army, you can actually be a person who's constantly being that guy who is kind of going, "Wait a minute" and have a successful career. And successful means 20 years, whatever it may be. You may not make general, you know? And that's okay. And I was that way. I joke all the time that one out of three bosses liked me. Luckily, they were guys like Petraeus and others you've heard of since then. But I think that was such an important part of my personality. And I don't think I recognized that and was able to recognize that in a potential employer, right? That I went to employers thinking, oh, I'll just fit right in. What's the big deal? When you realize that their corporate structure and their company culture wasn't big fans of being questioned, right? Or, it wasn't the kind of place where we're looking to kind of flip the table. Or, collaborative approach. One of the things we miss about the military service is that it's very top-driven, follow my orders and go to hell situation. And anybody who's served, I know you noticed all this—sure—is actually the military is one of the most collaborative leadership environments I've ever seen. That's why from a battalion commander—from battalion, even company commanders and above—even a young lieutenant in a platoon. What does he have? He has a platoon sergeant. And it's very rare that a platoon leader's going to make a decision without consulting his platoon sergeant, right? Or the squad leaders. It is the nature of our business that we're actually very collaborative. Battalions have entire staffs. And the battalion commander, he doesn't just go off. He has his staff present three courses of action, right? Or, as we joke when I was an officer, two courses of action that work and one to throw away. But again, that collaborative. It really isn't about a guy sitting in a room giving orders and having us just chase off. And so I brought that to my first company. And unfortunately, that environment wasn't as collaborative, if you will. I remember my second day in a job, I literally dragged every person in the company into a conference room to evaluate a proposal that had come in. And my CEO came in and looked at me like I was insane. "What are

you doing?" [LAUGH] "I've got a big project. I need these people's brains." He's like, "No, that's not how it works around here." And that's cool. That's their company, not mine. And so, I think you have to kind of look at that culture. You have to sit back and say, "Who am I? Where do I fit? What are the jobs in the Army that worked for me? Or, the weapons range. And are these . . ." And then ask the hard questions of people who work there. Ask the hard questions of the people who know them, and insure that you're going to an environment that is yours. Now, on the employer side, and we tell a lot of our clients this, especially the really big companies. We had a great client and they were hiring veterans like crazy, man. I mean, like nuts. And of all things, when they looked at their numbers, they were going down of percentage of veterans. And what we discovered was that they would bring a veteran into a certain department of this very large company. They had multiple departments. And maybe it won't be a good fit. Maybe that department or maybe that job wasn't a good cultural fit. And he would say, "Look, I'm not happy," and quit and leave. And we said, "Well, wait a minute. Do you have a system in place where maybe he would fit in another department? You're a big company. Maybe he could go from this sales division to insurance or whatever it may be." And they didn't, right? And so they're doing all this work, guys are coming in, part of that 45% that doesn't make it, and leaving without an option. So, we actually helped this company create a process where if a guy wasn't happy, especially a veteran, they say, "Well, let's see where you fit better. Let's introduce you to some other departments. Let's keep you within our company at least." So, I think there's two sides to that. One is as a veteran you have to understand who you are, what is the culture you're looking for, and can I find that. And two, as a hiring person, and at ScoutComms, is this going to be a good fit? If it's not how can I make it fit or send him somewhere else where they will fit. So, it's hard to underestimate the power of the culture of a company or a job when you go into it. And it's impossible to, you don't want to undermine that or dismiss it as not being important.

Timothy L.: Fred, thank you so much for sharing all the stories, the insights, and a lot of information that I think a lot of veterans don't consider when they're thinking about entrepreneurship and getting into the job market and stuff. So, I really appreciate that.

Fred W.: Well, thanks. I really appreciate the time. Always like sharing the story. We've come a long way in a short time.

Timothy L.: Yeah, of course. We're following you on Twitter @fpwellman. And of course, Fred, thank you for your service to our country.

Fred W.: My Pleausre. Thanks. I appreciate it a lot. Same to you, Tim, and keep up the good work. My shout to the VA is, and it really is true. Even as a military retiree who uses TRICARE, the VA has been a

very good friend to me. Again, when the Richmond District office processed, or Roanoke, sorry, Roanoke office. I was a desperate man when I finally submitted, you know, got around to submitting my benefits package. And God bless, and they turned it really quic . . .

Public Service Announcement:

Man 1: Getting out of the military I was missing this camaraderie.
Man 2: It's frustrating when you try to talk to people that don't understand.
Man 3: I still had the anger I still had the addictions, but we didn't talk about that
Woman: It came to a point where I was like "Ok I really need to talk to somebody about this."
Man 4: My family more or less encouraged me "go to the VA."
Man 4: It is ok to go get help, its ok to talk to people.
Man 5: Hear Veterans real stories of strength and recovery, go to MakeTheConnection.net

Post-interview monologue:

Veterans have been entrepreneurs for decades. Nearly half of Veterans returning from World War II became a business owner or operator. If you're interested in starting a business or entrepreneurship in general, check out va.gov/osdbu for information provided by The Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization. If you go to va.gov/osdbu/veteran you will find our Veteran Entrepreneurship Portal which has a handful of recourses that'll make your research and preparation easier.

Veteran of the Day
Today's Veteran of the Day is Army Veteran John Kamin. I caught up with John in Washington D.C. to hear about his service.

For John's full write up and photos, go to blogs.va.gov.

That's it for episode three. I want to thank you all for listening. I know there are a lot of options out there for entertainment so I appreciate you for spending your time with me. If you have any feedback or questions you' like to have answered on the show, please Tweet them to us using #VApodcast or emailing us newmedia@va.gov.

Be sure to visit Facebook.com/VeteransAffairs for more stories from our community. I'm Timothy Lawson, and I'll see you next week on Veterans Day.